

# FARMLAND NEEDED

*How Connecticut Can Help Farmers  
Access the Land They Need to Succeed*



Prepared by American Farmland Trust *in cooperation with*

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture

January, 2021





*Freund's Farm, East Canaan (Amanda Freund)*

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*Stanton Farm, Plainfield (CT Dept. of Agriculture)*

## **FORWARD FROM COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE BRYAN P. HURLBURT**



*Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt  
(CT Dept. of Agriculture)*

Agriculture has played a pivotal role in Connecticut’s culture and heritage for generations. Our state’s agricultural industry generates over \$4 billion dollars into the local economy. Our Connecticut Grown agricultural sector is made possible by the diverse farmers who have committed their lives to putting local products in our grocery stores and on our plates.

The working lands that sustain us are at the crux of our agricultural systems. Without access to secure land tenure, the future of farming remains uncertain for young and beginning farmers who wish to invest in Connecticut’s agricultural sector. The average age of a Connecticut farmer continues to rise, and many farmers find themselves land rich and cash poor. Developing new ways to incentivize these farmers to pass their working lands down to the next generation of farmers, or those wishing to expand their farming operations, is critical to the future of our agricultural sector.

Farmland Needed: How Connecticut Can Help Farmers Access the Land They Need to Succeed is the first land access report released by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture that provides a detailed overview as to the challenges and barriers farmers face in gaining access to land and those looking at exiting farming. The report also outlines how the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and service providers can work together to strengthen land access opportunities across the board.

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture encourages all service providers, policy makers, and farmers to use this guide as a tool and resource in configuring how to access farmland in our state.

## FORWARD FROM AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST'S SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR CRIS COFFIN & WORKING LANDS ALLIANCE DIRECTOR CHELSEA GAZILLO

*Thank you to the following American Farmland Trust staff for their support with this report including: Jamie Pottern, Caitlin Joseph, Brennan Hafner, Nathan L'Etoile, Laura Barley, and Jennifer Dempsey.*

American Farmland Trust was honored to collaborate with the Department of Agriculture in the process that culminated with this report. As a national organization focused on saving the land that sustains us, we understand the importance of keeping land available for farmers *and* keeping farmers on the land. The future of Connecticut agriculture depends on more secure land tenure opportunities for farmers; as we learned through listening to farmers, these opportunities will require more connections and greater engagement with the diversity of current Connecticut farmland owners, strengthened state and local policies and programming, and more coordination among the many service providers across the state. We are excited by the many innovative and practical suggestions that emerged through this process, and look forward to working in fierce cooperation with the Department, the farmers, and the service providers who contribute to this effort to save our farmland and help farmers—both established and aspiring—gain the ground they need to succeed.

*Jones Family Farm, Shelton (Working Lands Alliance)*



## EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

**Over the next 20 years, 371 million acres of farmland (41% of all farmland) in the United States is expected to change hands. The average age of principal farm operators in Connecticut is 58 years old and many of these farmers are looking to transition their farm operations to new ownership.**

According to a 2016 report written by American Farmland Trust and Land for Good, [Gaining Insight, Gaining Access](#), over 92% of Connecticut's 1,892 senior farmers do not have a young (under 45) farm operator working with them. In addition, other farmland owned by non-farming landowners is being transferred to the next generation, often without a clear direction towards long term agricultural use.

While uncertainty is growing about the imminent transition of ownership for thousands of Connecticut's farmland acres in the near future, we know that competition for available farmland is already high. Aspiring, beginning, and established farmers compete with each other and against developers seeking land for residential, commercial, industrial, and, increasingly, renewable energy development. According to a 2018 report written by the National Young Farmers Coalition, *Building a Future with Farmers*, the biggest issue facing young and beginning farmers in our country is access to land tenure. This competition has only intensified as farmland conversion in Connecticut continues. According to American Farmland Trust's 2020 *"Farms Under Threat: The State of the States,"* 23,000 acres of Connecticut farmland were converted to urban development or low density residential land use between 2001 and 2016, putting Connecticut in the top three states nationally for the percent of farmland developed or compromised.<sup>1</sup> Conversion and competition fuel rising farmland values: the 2019 National Agricultural Statistics Service Agricultural Land survey found that the average price of an acre of farmland in Connecticut was \$12,200.<sup>2</sup>

Our sense of urgency regarding the future of Connecticut farmland is intensified by several factors. First, climate change contributes to erratic weather conditions and uncertainty around our growing seasons. Without secure land tenure, farmers struggle to implement sound farming practices that will help mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. Second, as a result of historically discriminatory policies and ongoing racial inequities, farmers that are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) continue to face barriers to land access. Finally, in light of the food insecurity revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to promote land access for the production of food is apparent now more than ever.

This report - the culmination of a year of focus groups, interviews, and meetings - outlines goals for both the Connecticut Department of Agriculture and the agriculture service provider community that, if implemented, will create land access opportunities for new and beginning farmers, allow existing farmers to expand their farming operations, and increase succession planning among farmers and other landowners who wish to pass their land on to a farmer.

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<sup>1</sup>Freedgood, J., M. Hunter, J. Dempsey, A. Sorensen. 2020. *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

<sup>2</sup>USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *Land Values 2019 Summary. Table on pg. 5 Average Farm Real Estate Value – United States, Connecticut*. Washington, D.C.: USDA-NASS, August 2019.

## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH

In August 2019, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture commissioned American Farmland Trust to undertake an examination of: 1) the lack of access to affordable land for farmers seeking to start or expand a farm business, and 2) the difficulty older farmers face in transitioning their land and farm business to a farm successor while meeting their own financial needs. A 15-member Farmland Access Working Group was assembled, guided by Chelsea Gazillo, Working Lands Alliance Director, AFT, with assistance from Cris Coffin, Senior Policy Advisor, AFT, and Jiff Martin, Extension Educator, UConn Extension.

The Working Group developed **13 recommendations**:

- 2 recommendations are broadly focused on *developing a vision and tracking progress*
- 6 recommendations are focused on *state agency action, including recommended changes to existing programs and services* at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture
- 5 recommendations deal with *opportunities for agriculture service providers to improve coordination and develop new programming.*

This report also summarizes key findings from focus groups and interviews that highlight the need for service providers, municipalities, state agencies, and policy makers to support new and beginning farmers in their quest to find land and to farmers who are looking to transition their land to the next generation.

*Kuss Farm, Bethlehem (Working Lands Alliance)*



The Land Access Working Group met four times between August 2019 and January 2020. Members of the group included:

Raven Blake	Connecticut- Community Organizing for Racial Equity
Dina Brewster	Northeast Organic Farming Association of Connecticut
Robert Chang	Echo Farm
Robin Chesmer	Graywall Farms
Cris Coffin	American Farmland Trust
Kathleen Doherty	Connecticut Farmland Trust
Chelsea Gazillo	American Farmland Trust - Working Lands Alliance
Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt	Connecticut Department of Agriculture
Kip Kolesinskas	Conservation Consultant - Working Lands Alliance
Jiff Martin	University of Connecticut Extension Services
Susan Mitchell	Cloverleigh Farm
Elisabeth Moore	Connecticut Farmland Trust
Joan Nichols	Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
Will O'Meara	Land For Good
Lily Orr	Connecticut Farmland Trust
Charlotte Ross	Sweet Acre Farm
Keith Stechschulte	Farm Credit East
Cam Weimar	Connecticut Department of Agriculture



*Freund's Farm, East Canaan (Amanda Freund)*

## The Working Group agreed to explore the following issues:

- How farmland preservation impacts land access and farm transfer and succession
- Opportunities to add additional land into agricultural (primarily food) production
- Acknowledging and addressing systemic inequities in land ownership
- Issues around farm transfer and succession planning
- The importance of secure land tenure for farmers
- Issues around farmland affordability
- How municipal decisions affect land access
- How gender, race, class, and family dynamics affect land access and farm transfer and succession

The project gathered input directly from farmers and service providers through focus groups and one-on-one interviews. One focus group targeted farmers who were seeking land to start or expand their farm operation and the second focus group targeted agricultural service providers.<sup>3</sup> One-on-one interviews were conducted with six farmers seeking land and eight farmers looking to transition out of agriculture. The New Connecticut Farmer Alliance also shared a survey with their listserv asking new and beginning farmers to outline their challenges in finding farmland in the state.

A summary of stakeholder input was shared with the Working Group. The Working Group reviewed stakeholder input, discussed options, and then developed 13 recommendations to increase land access and succession planning opportunities.

There are six recommendations for the Connecticut Department of Agriculture, five recommendations for service providers, and two general recommendations.

In addition to the 13 recommendations, a resource list was assembled for farmland seekers and farmers seeking help with farm transfers or succession. This list of state programs and policies can be found at the end of this report and will be made available on the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's webpage.



<sup>3</sup> A list of participants from the focus groups can be found in the acknowledgements.

## SECTION 2: RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group developed 13 recommendations. Two recommendations are broadly focused on developing a vision and tracking progress. Six recommendations are focused on state agency action, including recommended changes to existing programs and services at the Connecticut Department of Agriculture. Five recommendations deal with opportunities for agriculture service providers to improve coordination and develop new programming. Recommendations that would require statutory changes or additional state resources were considered outside the scope of this report.

### Goals for All

#### 1. **Develop a mechanism to track progress on farmland access and transfer recommendations.**

Indicators and data collection systems should be developed by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Farmland Access Working Group and other partners.

#### 2. **Develop a vision for agriculture in Connecticut, with an accompanying Strategic Plan.**

This plan will cultivate an equitable and just food system and also provide access to agricultural products and services in the region defined by the sustainable use of land and water ecosystems in a changing climate.

*Brown's Harvest, Windsor (CT Dept. of Agriculture)*



## Goals for the Connecticut Department of Agriculture

### **1. Re-focus the Community Farms Preservation Program to accelerate and emphasize the protection of small farm parcels in demand among minority, socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers.**

Request the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board and/or Farmland Access Working Group recommend program revisions focusing on changes that: accelerate protection of small farm parcels that meet the needs of these stakeholders, leverage federal funding, enable use of the Department's Buy-Protect-Sell authority to act quickly on small parcels threatened by development, and make greater use of land trusts to facilitate projects.

### **2. Expand the Connecticut FarmLink Program to function as the point-of-entry resource and referral service for farm seekers, farmland owners, and exiting farmers. Utilize the full amount of state funds that are annually assigned to this program by allocating resources, or identifying resources, as well as engaging services of partner organizations to carry out the following functions:**

- a. Where possible, refer farmland seekers, farmers, and landowners to service providers who can provide individualized assistance in matching them with each other. This could be done through a circuit-rider model that could help provide individualized support services to farmland seekers and owners. These individual support services can include assistance with parcel/farm evaluations, on-site investigations, as well as referrals to appropriate state, federal, and non-profit programs.
- b. Improve the existing website to maintain a resources hub for farmers and landowners seeking information on how to find land to lease or purchase, find a farm successor or farm lessee, develop a farm transfer or succession strategy, and find experts to assist them.
- c. Continue to maintain a listing of farm seekers, farmers, and farmland owners who have land and business opportunities available for lease or purchase.
- d. Through expanded partnerships and previously established personal service agreements (PSA), increase outreach to municipalities, realtors, non-government organizations (NGOs), and institutions to identify and post urban plots of land available for urban farms/community gardens.
- e. Assist landowners to provide a more complete listing of their property that includes photos, property lines, soil maps, and full descriptions of all infrastructure.



**3. *Annually prioritize farmland access for the Farm Viability Grant Program by prioritizing projects that include, but are not limited to, the following:***

- a. Increasing access to farmland, including outreach to municipalities, to identify private or publicly-owned land that may be available for leasing, hosting mixers for farmland seekers and farmland owners, providing support to socially disadvantaged farmers seeking farmland, and assisting farmers with developing farm transfer and succession strategies.
- b. Expanding and improving incubator farm program services and training targeted to socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers.
- c. Enhancing climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency strategies such as improving soil health, increasing the amount of cover crops used on a farm operation, identifying ways for farmers to participate in carbon markets, and/or other agricultural strategies that will combat climate change.

**4. *Coordinate the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program and Connecticut FarmLink Program to improve and expand farmland access, farm transfer, and succession.***

- a. Review and revise the Farmland Preservation Program policies and regulations to better reflect the current and future needs of agriculture, such as policies around subdivision, easement amendments, housing for owner-operators and farm laborers, and eligibility criteria and priorities that are possible without statutory changes.
- b. Conduct outreach to current owners of farmland protected through the program to share information on Connecticut FarmLink as well as programs and services offered by service providers around farm transfer and succession.
- c. Request the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board:
  - i. Investigate potential use of an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value and/or Affirmative Covenant to Farm in conjunction with the state's Farmland Preservation Program and Community Farms Preservation Program, including whether new statutory authority would be required to implement either. Recommend implementation guidelines and criteria.
  - ii. Respond to the needs of owners of land protected through the program facing challenges around transfer of large acreage.
  - iii. Find ways to accelerate the pace of Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program projects from application to closing.



*Susan Mitchell, Cloverleigh Farm  
(CT Dept. of Agriculture)*

**5. Expand access to Connecticut Department of Agriculture's grant programs for women, socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers, including the Farm Viability Grant Program, Farmland Restoration Program, and Farm Transition Grant Program. This can be done by:**

- a. Increasing outreach to women, socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers to raise awareness about these programs.
- b. Consider prioritizing funding by ranking projects higher that are led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color as well as projects that will contribute to environmental justice.
- c. Developing better relationships (with the desired outcome to increase awards) to underserved constituencies by inviting organizations to collaborate and suggest ways to better support the unique needs of women, socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers in Connecticut.

**6. Continue to seek ways to increase acreage of state-owned lands available for farming. This includes:**

- a. Developing a Memorandum of Understanding with Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to accelerate identification of parcels managed by DEEP that could be made available for farming, to assist with lease/permit terms, and to list all lease/permit opportunities on Connecticut FarmLink.
- b. Providing guidance to municipalities, land trusts, and agricultural commissions on developing leases/permits for land owned for agricultural use. Facilitate listing the opportunities on Connecticut FarmLink.

*Connecticut Farmland (John Spinnato, Eighty-Six Media)*



## Goals for Agriculture Service Providers

**1. Invest in the delivery of one-on-one technical assistance for farm seekers (purchase or lease), farmland owners seeking a farm lessee, and producers that are transitioning out of agriculture. Many service providers are offering services in this area including Connecticut Farmland Trust, Land for Good, and others. However, additional individualized assistance is needed for:**

- a. Advising and consulting on site evaluation
- b. Developing farm-friendly leases
- c. Developing a persuasive listing on Connecticut FarmLink
- d. Matching farmland seekers with farmland owners
- e. Farm transfer and succession planning
- f. Financing a farm purchase
- g. Identifying and accessing federal and state assistance programs

**2. Pursue funding for projects that would activate an engaged and inclusive network of stakeholders. Potential activities:**

- a. Based on demand and a successful pilot hosted by several farmland access working group members, continue to host mixers throughout the state where farmland seekers and farmland owners can meet, connect with one another, and network. Commit to inclusive events that welcome a diverse pool of seekers and owners.
- b. Invite organizations to collaborate and suggest ways to better support the unique needs of socially disadvantaged, beginning, and veteran farmers in Connecticut.
- c. Conduct outreach to students at Connecticut's regional agricultural science and technology centers and youth in community-based agriculture education programs about opportunities and services related to accessing farmland.

**3. Increase the availability of farmland parcels for lease by:**

- a. Educating land trusts in leasing protected land for agricultural use and establishing better relationships with farmers.
- b. Increasing adoption of innovative land tenure and farmland affordability models such as ground leases, community land trusts, and socially responsible farmland investment models across the state, especially in urban areas.
- c. Working with state agencies to identify and catalog state-owned parcels available for agriculture leasing.
- d. Develop an outreach plan and materials with partners such as municipal commissions, agriculture organizations, and other nonprofits to reach absentee, weekend, and non-farming landowners about the needs, opportunities, and benefits of selling or leasing land to beginning farmers.

**4. Increase resources and attention on farmland access in the context of urban agriculture by:**

- a. Working with municipal governments to identify urban plots/vacant lots that can be used for food production.
- b. Educating city councils and planners about urban agriculture and encouraging zoning changes to enable and encourage both commercial and community farms.
- c. Supporting the development and implementation of Urban Agriculture Master Plans.
- d. Strengthening the links between land access and food security.

**5. Increase the availability of land for farming by encouraging best practices among municipalities. This includes:**

- a. Listing town-owned agricultural property with address, size, lease terms, date of renewal, and associated costs.
- b. Applying Public Act 490 equitably within and between municipalities.
- c. Developing model agriculture zoning bylaws.
- d. Meeting municipal goals for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience through agriculture preservation and support.

*Lelani Correa and Lucrecia Barazza at Reservoir Community Farm, Green Village Initiative (Green Village Initiative)*



## SECTION 3: KEY FINDINGS

The recommendations were generated from findings developed through the stakeholder engagement process. These insights are organized into three sub-categories of input: from farmers that are seeking farmland, from farmers seeking to transition out of agriculture, and from agricultural service providers.

### Input from Farmers Seeking Farmland

*Context: Competition for available farmland in Connecticut is stiff. Aspiring, beginning, and established farmers compete with each other and against developers seeking land for residential, commercial, industrial and, increasingly, renewable energy development. This competition has intensified as farmland conversion in Connecticut continues. According to American Farmland Trust's 2020 "Farms Under Threat: The State of the States" report, 23,000 acres of Connecticut farmland were converted to urban development or low-density residential land use between 2001 and 2016, putting Connecticut in the top three states nationally for the percent of farmland developed or compromised.<sup>4</sup> Conversion and competition continue to cause farmland prices to rise: the 2019 National Agricultural Statistics Service Agricultural Land survey found that the average price of an acre of farmland in Connecticut was \$12,200.<sup>5</sup>*

Over the past 40 years, Connecticut has largely maintained its commitment to protecting Connecticut's farmland from development. As of January 2021, the state's Farmland Preservation Program has protected over 46,000 acres or 386 farms from development. The Connecticut legislature has also created several additional tools to assist with farmland protection and access, including the Connecticut FarmLink program and the Community Farms Preservation Program.

Connecticut FarmLink connects farmland owners with farm seekers; the Community Farms Preservation Program is focused on protecting smaller farm parcels for food production.

The following findings outline the challenges and barriers beginning farmers faced when attempting to find secure land tenure in Connecticut.

#### **Key Findings**

- 1. Farmland is unaffordable for many new and beginning farmers.*
- 2. Inhospitable local zoning bylaws and interpretations of Public Act 490 limit the availability and viability of farmland in many communities.*
- 3. Access to more capital is needed to purchase farmland in Connecticut.*
- 4. Insecure farmland tenure impedes efforts to establish/grow a farm business.*
- 5. Barriers to farmland access and land ownership are even higher for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and refugee farmers.*
- 6. Farmland seekers see conversion of farmland, especially to residential and solar development, as a direct threat to their ability to access farmland.*
- 7. Climate change is affecting growing seasons and farm viability making it harder to invest in farm businesses without access to secure land tenure.*

<sup>4</sup>Freedgood, J., Hunter, M., & Sorensen, A. (2020). *Farms under threat: The state of the states*. American Farmland Trust.

<sup>5</sup>USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *Land Values 2019 Summary. Table on pg. 5 Average Farm Real Estate Value – United States, Connecticut*. Washington, D.C.: USDA-NASS, August 2019.

**Key Finding #1: Farmland is unaffordable for many new and beginning farmers.**

Many farmers seeking land indicated that affordable farmland ownership and leasing opportunities are a significant challenge. They recognize the value of the state’s Farmland Preservation Program (FPP), which has permanently protected over 46,000 acres from development. However, they note that many of them cannot afford the price of even permanently protected farmland. Several beginning farmers noted another challenge with the FPP; namely, that the typical size of a protected parcel of farmland is larger than what they need and that the program prohibits subdivision of parcels. The high price of farmland has fueled a continued reliance on leased land; 23% of farms rely on leased land, and 6.5% rely *entirely* on leased land as tenant farmers.<sup>6</sup>

*“It’s such a downer to spend years looking for land to farm, driving by properties with acres and acres of prime farmland on your way to look at some swampy, rocky property that’s still too expensive and really far away from markets and population centers. I think that’s a real hardship, that a beginner would never even have that perfect farm property on their list of affordable properties.” - Beginning Farmer on Farmland Access*



*Long Table Farm, Lyme (Working Lands Alliance)*

**Key Finding #2: Inhospitable local zoning bylaws and interpretations of Public Act 490 limit the availability and viability of farmland in many communities.**

Public Act 490

In 1963, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Public Act 490 (PA 490), Connecticut’s current use value assessment law for the state’s farm, forest, and open space land. Unlike in many states, where land use values for current use valuation are set at the state level and municipalities must adhere to the state’s valuations, PA 490 gives local town assessors the latitude to deviate from the values recommended by the state. Organizations such as the Connecticut Farm Bureau Association work with town assessors to help them understand the importance of the PA 490 program and the rationale behind the recommended values. However, a number of municipalities have chosen to develop their own, higher land use values for land enrolled in PA 490, creating economic hardship for some farmers.

<sup>6</sup> USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *2017 Census of Agriculture – State-level Data. Table 52: Selected Producer Characteristics, Connecticut*. Washington, D.C.: USDA-NASS, April 2019. USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service. *2017 Census of Agriculture – State-level Data. Table 76: Summary by Tenure of Farm Operation, Connecticut*. Washington, D.C.: USDA-NASS, April 2019.

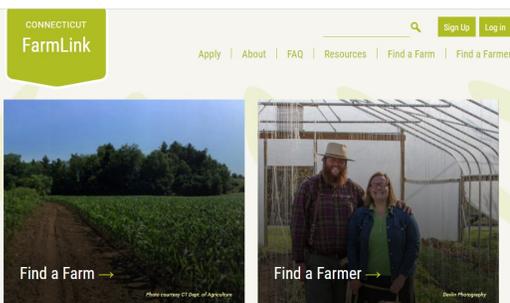
## Zoning

In many of Connecticut's cities and suburbs, where there is increasing interest in both commercial and community farming, there is a lack of local zoning regulations that support agriculture. For instance, in Bridgeport, there is no clear land use zone that allows for agricultural use. Without zoning regulations that support agricultural use, urban farmers face uncertainty and insecure land tenure on parcels of land they own or rent. Rural areas can also be inhospitable to agriculture. Some zoning bylaws hinder aspects of a farm's operations. For example, one farmer said her municipality would not allow for a barn to be built on a piece of farmland without a primary residence on the parcel (Beginning Farmer Focus Group, 2019).

### **Key Finding #3: Insecure farmland tenure impedes efforts to establish/grow a farm business.**

A common concern among farmland seekers was insecurity of land tenure when leasing farmland. Many landowners are not interested in leases that run more than 1 to 3 years; some are especially hesitant to take on the risk of a long-term lease with a new or young farmer who may not have a background or degree in farming, a formal degree in agriculture, or a solid business plan. In addition, many farmers noted that farmland available for lease often has no housing, making it problematic to use if a farmer does not live close to the farm. Without secure long-term access, farmers have little incentive to invest in farm infrastructure or make improvements to the soil. Insecure land access also undermines the stability of a farm business seeking to build a local customer base. Some local land trusts are leasing farmland they own to farmers. However, many of these land trusts struggle to understand the unique needs of farmers, especially young and beginning farmers.

A program within the Connecticut Department of Agriculture—Connecticut FarmLink—was created in 2007 as part of the Community Investment Act to address this challenge. The program has a website where landowners may post [it is not a realty brokerage with “listings”] farm properties available for sale or lease. It also enables farm seekers to list the type of farm property they seek. The Department has recently entered into a cooperative agreement with Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) to manage the program. Since entering this cooperative agreement, CFT has updated the website's listings and requires participants to update their information every two years. There continues to be more farmland seekers than listed parcels on the site. As of fall 2020 there are 491 farm seekers on the site compared to 96 parcels listed for purchase or lease.



A clearinghouse for the transition between generations of landowners with the goal of keeping farmland in production. There is a new generation of farmers who want to be tomorrow's stewards of the land today, but they need land to work.

CT FarmLink Webpage

*“We have been looking for land in our area. It doesn't have to be huge necessarily or have farm infrastructure, we are fairly flexible. We have found a couple of properties and some are raw land without infrastructure. We can potentially afford the raw land purchase, but zoning laws have proven to be a challenge to us. In one of our most promising land search finds, we found raw land and wanted to build a secondary building without a primary residence, but this was restricted by Municipality zoning laws. Even the zoning person I spoke to in the town offices realized it inhibited appropriate agricultural activities and told me we needed to work to change the law.” - Beginning Farmer on Farmland Access*

Farm ownership loan limits have been barriers to the purchase of some farm parcels in Connecticut. Farm Credit East (FCE) and USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) are the primary lenders farmers turn to for help with financing for farm purchases in the state. The increase in the FSA direct farm ownership loan limit to \$600,000, a change made in the 2018 Farm Bill, may make it easier for some customers to purchase higher-value farm parcels. In order to be eligible for a loan from FSA, borrowers must be unable to obtain credit elsewhere at reasonable rates and terms to meet actual needs. In some cases, this can be a barrier for farmers if they have a spouse who brings in off-farm income.

Farm Credit East does not have a loan limit for farmers who wish to purchase farmland parcels. However, FCE mortgage interest rates are tied to current market rates while FSA can offer lower mortgage rates to farmers. Another barrier for beginning farmers who wish to finance with FCE is coming up with the twenty percent down payment. However, FCE often works with FSA to offer beginning farmers a loan with smaller down payment requirements. Through FSA's Down Payment Assistance Program, the applicant must make a cash-down payment of at least 5 percent of the purchase price and the maximum loan amount may not exceed 45 percent of the smallest of; 1) the purchase price of the farm to be acquired, 2) the appraised value of the farm to be acquired, or 3) \$667,000 (Note: This results in a maximum loan amount of \$300,150.). The remaining balance (50 percent) may be obtained from FCE (or another lender).

This financing option can be helpful for farmers who are able to secure funding for a down payment which is still a challenge with the high cost of Connecticut's farmland that is available on the speculative market.

*"When land trusts acquire chunks of land in an area, they're often most concerned with it just not being developed. Agriculture may not be a priority when selecting land for preservation, or even of interest in the usage of the land. So preserved lands may be removed from agricultural usage potentially increasing even greater competition for farmers to access land."* - Beginning Farmer on Farmland Access



*The Hickories, Ridgefield (Working Lands Alliance)*

## CASE STUDY #1

### Identifying and securing land with the help of USDA-FSA and Farm Credit East

*The following case study highlights how one pair of beginning farmers successfully used financial lending programs and technical assistance to secure a parcel of farmland in Connecticut.*



Charlotte Ross and her husband have operated their Certified Organic farm, Sweet Acre, for 10 years. They both work on the farm full time. For their first 3 years in business they farmed on rented land in Northeastern Connecticut, before buying their current property in Lebanon in 2014. Prior to starting their business, they were farm apprentices in Maine where they felt the services for beginning farmers through the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Assoc (MOFGA) were very robust and accessible.

After a season in Maine, they returned to their home state of Connecticut and secured a privately-owned, one-acre plot of land in Mansfield through the Connecticut FarmLink program. They were able to rent an apartment down the street from the farm. Charlotte and Jonathan always intended to purchase land and own their own farm and spent all three winters that they rented looking all over Eastern Connecticut for a place to buy. They were able to spread their net far and wide as they built up their community of colleagues and friends through farming. Nevertheless, the search was long and rather grueling, as there were few farmable properties for sale. Most real estate agents knew little about assessing land for agriculture (which made for many a wasted trip to a boulder swamp), and most suitable properties were well out of their price-range as full-time working farmers. Charlotte noted “We were looking at really expensive junk.”

Eventually, their farmer friends at Beltane Farm (who they sold with at a farmer’s market) told them about a neighboring property with a run-down house, small barn, and some land in Lebanon. They looked at the place and, although the house would need to be totally gutted, the fields were relatively flat, open, and well-draining. At the time, the two were participants in UConn Extension’s Scaling Up program that was funded through a USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) grant. They also had access to professionals in soil health (Kip Kolesinskas), and agriculture (Eero Ruttilla & Jude Boucher) who were able to visit and help assess the property ahead of purchase.

With the help of USDA-FSA’s Down Payment Assistance Program and Farm Credit East, Charlotte and Jonathan were able to get a mortgage to purchase the land. The Farm Credit East loan has a high interest rate but the low interest on the USDA-FSA loan makes for a reasonable combined rate. There was no turmoil in the seller’s family, which was helpful. They used a combination of a Capital Loan and Operational Loan through USDA-FSA to help them with the high start-up costs of their first season in Lebanon, and the infrastructure needs that often face Beginner Farmers on a new piece of land. Charlotte recognized how important it was for her to own the land and live on the land she and her husband are farming – “renting land never seemed like a long-term option to us. There is so much invested in the soil and ecology on an organic farm that would be left behind at the end of a lease. Beginner Farmers who rent for the long term run a high risk of never gaining equity in the place that they invest all their time, effort and money. Without equity, how can they really build a viable farm business?”

**Key Finding #5: Barriers to farmland access and land ownership are even higher for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and refugee farmers.**

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, there are 134 BIPOC producers in Connecticut, amounting to 1.4% of all producers and another 1.4% are Hispanic. Yet 20% of the state’s population identify as people of color (US Census Bureau, 2010). The challenges associated with accessing secure land tenure opportunities are key reasons for this disparity. A robust body of literature documents the historical and structural drivers of racial and ethnic disparities in farmland tenure and farming in the United States.<sup>7</sup> BIPOC farmers in Connecticut have been impacted by such systemic barriers at the municipal, state, and federal levels, which resulted in BIPOC farmers experiencing land dispossession and the denial of access to capital and resources to enable land ownership. For these reasons, few farmers of color own and rent farmland in Connecticut today. Especially in urban and peri-urban areas, lack of land ownership and long-term leasing opportunities prevent many BIPOC farmers from growing food.



*“I know how to farm and in some ways we are still using a lot of the same practices we used in Africa, however, I don’t understand American systems of farming including technologies that are new to me.” - Refugee Farmer, One-on-One Interview*

*Hassan Aden and Dugsia Ahmed Khalif of All Farmers (Working Lands Alliance)*

<sup>7</sup> Carpenter, S. 2012. “The USDA discrimination cases: Pigford, In re Black Farmers, Keepseagle, Garcia, and Love.” Drake Journal of Agricultural Law, 17(1), 1–35.

Calo, A., and De Master, K. T. 2016. “After the incubator: Factors impeding land access along the path from farmworker to proprietor.” Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, 6(2), 111–127.

Horst, M. and Marion, A. 2019 “Racial, ethnic and gender inequities in farmland ownership and farming in the U.S.” Agriculture and Human Values 36:1–16.

Food justice leaders of color across the state emphasize the role of secure farmland ownership and farming opportunities as key pathways to address the economic, environmental, and social injustices that were created by centuries of policies which exploited BIPOC farmers. Farming represents an opportunity for BIPOC farmers to reconnect with the land, promote food justice, and create self-determination/sufficiency through food cultivation.

Over the past 20 years, Connecticut has become home to many new Americans for whom farming may have been a way of life for their families. Some of these new American refugee farmers are working to find land in hopes of cultivating culturally appropriate foods for their communities and educating their youth about farming. With limited access to land, capital, and educational opportunities to adjust their skills for Connecticut's climate, many refugee farmers struggle to start and sustain a viable farm business.

***Key Finding #6: Farmland seekers see conversion of farmland, especially to residential and solar development, as a direct threat to their ability to access farmland.***

Many farmers interviewed cited instances where land they had been renting was sold for either solar or housing development. In these types of situations, the Farmland Preservation Program can be used to enable a farmer to purchase the property and simultaneously sell the development rights through the FPP, effectively reducing the purchase price significantly for the property. However, the FPP process is time consuming, and many landowners seeking to sell land are not able or interested in waiting for what can be a multi-year process. Further tools are needed to enable an expedited process for these situations.

One tool that has been recently clarified in statute is authority for the Connecticut Department of Agriculture to purchase farmland in fee simple or full market value, protect it through the Farmland Preservation Program, and sell the protected land to a land trust or other not for profit organization. This authority—known as Buy-Protect-Sell has not yet been used. The Department has been working with several land trust partners on the guidelines for its implementation (see recommendations for the Department of Agriculture at the beginning part of the report).

***Key Finding #7: Climate change is affecting growing seasons and farm viability making it harder to invest in farm businesses without access to secure land tenure.***

Over the past 10 years, Connecticut's farmers have experienced an increasing number of extreme weather events that impact their production. Rainfall is also more erratic, with more rain in shorter time frames, and longer dry spells. Farmers across the state have identified the shifting climate as a barrier to securing investments in their farm ventures. It is difficult to do financial and market planning when weather patterns are extremely variable as a result of climate change. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the average temperature in Connecticut has increased by three degrees in the state since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Investing in farming practices that can help mitigate against extreme weather events costs time, money, and secure land tenure. Without secure land access, farmers feel apprehensive to invest in these farming practices to reduce the effect of climate change which benefits all of Connecticut's residents.

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<sup>8</sup>Runkle, J., K. Kunkel, S. Champion, D. Easterling, B. Stewart, R. Frankson, and W. Sweet, 2017: Connecticut State Climate Summary. *NOAA Technical Report NESDIS 149-CT*, 4 pp.

### Growing, expanding, and passing on Graywall Farms in Lebanon, CT, to the next generation.

*The following case study highlights how secure land access can help a farmer establish and grow a farm business. This case study also shows how proper succession planning can ensure that farmland remains productive for future generations.*

Robin Chesmer owns Graywall Farms in Lebanon, CT. Robin originally purchased a 35-acre farm in 1975, raising hay and dairy replacement heifers. In 1989, he leased a neighboring 185-acre dairy farm and purchased 80 milk cows. The owner was ready to retire but wanted to see the farm remain in active agriculture. After three years the owners sold the development rights to the State of Connecticut and Robin was able to purchase the farm at its agricultural value.

Over the past 30 years, Graywall Farms has expanded to over 1,000 acres of owned land with almost 800 acres protected from development by the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. The farm rents over 600 acres of cropland and when the opportunity is available, it tries to purchase additional land. The Farmland Preservation Program has been a valuable tool in making acquisitions possible.

Robin did not expect his children to be interested in taking over the farm. However, after his son Lincoln finished college, he showed great interest in the farm and today is responsible for managing the farm's operations. Robin is fortunate that he and his son share the same vision and pride of ownership. He stated that agriculture is a capital-intensive business requiring significant financial investment.

Robin believes there is opportunity, on farms like his, to use underutilized land for the benefit of young farmers growing vegetables or similar crops.

He noted that the town of Lebanon has started looking at farmland access and how to make farmland available to the next generation.

*Robin Chesmer (center), with son Lincoln Chesmer (left), and grandson Grant Chesmer (right) of Graywall Farms, Lebanon (Working Lands Alliance)*



*Graywall Farms, Lebanon (graywallfarm.com)*

## **Input from Farmers Seeking to Transition Out of Agriculture**

*Context: Over the next 20 years, 371 million acres of farmland (41% of all farmland) in the United States is expected to change hands (American Farmland Trust, 2016). A 2016 report, *Gaining Insights, Gaining Access*, released by American Farmland Trust and Land for Good, looked at how this generational transfer may affect Connecticut. It found that 32 percent of Connecticut's principal farm operators are 65 years or older, steward over 31 percent of land in farms in the state (136,622 acres) and own an estimated \$1.6 billion in land and farm buildings. It also found that over 92% of these senior farmers did not have a young (under age 45) farm operator working with them, suggesting that the future of many of these farms is uncertain. Indeed, many farmers looking at transitioning their farms to the next generation struggle to find a successor (Connecticut. Dept of Agriculture, 2019). This problem will continue to grow as the average age of a Connecticut farmer continues to rise; according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the average age is now 58. Without an identified successor, many farms are at risk of being lost and sold to development once a farmer retires from farming.*

### **Key Findings**

- 1. Discussing farmland transfer with family members can be challenging and stressful.*
- 2. Navigating the process of choosing the right succession strategy/service providers can be confusing and expensive.*
- 3. Exiting farmers are challenged with finding a successor who can afford to purchase and maintain the farm.*
- 4. The preservation process for the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program can be time consuming. The program can serve as a vital tool to help with succession.*

### **Key Finding #1: Discussing farmland transfer with family members can be challenging and stressful.**

Several farmers considering retirement noted that discussing farmland transition with their families can be stressful. This discussion comes with a lot of emotion and can involve sensitive family dynamics, including identifying a person within the family to carry on the farm business. It can also be fraught with sensitivities around the management and the future of the farm business as the senior generation steps back but potentially not away altogether. One farmer noted that a facilitated farmland succession conversation amongst key family members exposed many of the challenges with the farm operations. While the conversation was fruitful, it was difficult, and the family was unable to draw conclusions on the best solution for their farm. Another farmer mentioned the challenge of discussing farm transfer with his 89-year-old mother, as it was emotionally tough to discuss what would happen to the family farm after her passing.

**Key Finding #2: Navigating the process of choosing the right succession strategy/service providers can be confusing and expensive.**

Connecticut's service providers offer an array of technical assistance services to help farmers with succession planning. Several exiting farmers noted that succession planning can be expensive, especially if it involves hiring an attorney and/or a financial advisor. Some did not know where to start. One participant noted that having access to a list/a point of contact and/or centralized location with succession information would be helpful in starting a succession planning conversation and process with his farm family. Others noted the cost of hiring a good attorney who understood the complexities of an agricultural business as a large expense. There is no one size fits all succession plan for farmers.

One farmer interviewed for this report noted that having a "business psychologist" was extremely helpful in discussing farmland succession with loved ones and the next generation. This was because the psychologist was able to mediate family dynamics that were hindering the succession planning process while providing business expertise on what the best option was for a successful farm business and land transfer when the principal farmer decides it is time to retire.

**Key Finding #3: Exiting farmers are challenged with finding a successor who can afford to purchase and maintain the farm.**

Most senior farmers do not have a young operator working alongside them who is poised to take over the farm. In many cases, this is because the farm business cannot support multiple operators. While some senior farmers may have a child or family member who will step in once they retire, many others do not and struggle to identify a successor. For many senior farmers, the liquidity of their retirement is tied to selling their farmland. While a majority of farmers interviewed through the *Gaining Access* project indicated they want to see their land remain in farming, many said they were challenged in finding a next generation farmer to buy the farm and business given the cost of the land and property taxes.

*"It can be hard to accept that the next generation may have a different attitude about the farm operation."*  
- One-on-One interview with exiting farmer

*"I was fortunate that my son shared the same vision and pride of ownership"* - Member of Farmland Access Working Group

Beltane Farm, Lebanon (Connecticut Farmland Trust)





**Key Finding #4: The preservation process for the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program can be time consuming. The program can serve as a vital tool to help with succession.**

For many Connecticut farmers, the state’s Farmland Preservation Program (FPP) has been instrumental in enabling older farmers to transition their farm to the next generation, either within the family or through a sale to a younger non-family farmer. However, this option is not available to all farmers, and some farmers feel the program is too restricting. In their *Gaining Insights, Gaining Access* report American Farmland Trust and Land for Good noted: “Many farmers have been unable to sell an agricultural conservation easement because of lack of state funding or because their land is ineligible, others have tried but felt the valuation of the easement was too low. Not all were enthusiastic. A few participants expressed reservations about restricting their land with an easement that might limit future viability or stability”. Many farmers interviewed cited the amount of time it takes from applying to the state’s Farmland Preservation Program to closing on the sale of an agricultural conservation easement as time consuming. This deters some farmers from applying to the program.

In 2015, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture’s Farmland Preservation Program Advisory Board drafted recommendations outlining some of the steps needed to increase the pace of farmland preservation projects in the state. One recommendation was to sign service agreements with land trusts that could help with stewardship and administrative work associated with the application process. That recommendation was adopted and the Department of Agriculture has since signed service agreements with Connecticut Farmland Trust and the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy. These agreements have helped increase the pace of the Farmland Preservation Program substantially. However, more can be done to increase the pace of PDR projects including revising the administrative oversight process, conducting preliminary time to work on projects, and incentivizing broader participation in the Community Farms Preservation Program.<sup>9</sup>

*“I wish this process [Farmland Preservation Program] was faster and wanting to preserve more of Connecticut’s farmland for future generations” – Expanding Farmer, One-on-One interviews*

<sup>9</sup> November 30, 2015, CT Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Advisory Board, Final Revised Report from Subcommittee on PDR Program Best Practices

## Input from Service Providers

*Context: An increasing number of service providers in Connecticut are focused on improving land access for the state's growing number of farmland seekers, and providing support to those seeking to transition out of agriculture or farmland ownership. As part of the project, providers were asked to evaluate the success of the programs and services they offer in helping farmers gain ground and address farm transfer and succession and where they felt state agencies and the service provider community could do more.*

### **Key Findings**

- 1. More technical assistance is needed to support landowners in both selling and leasing their land to a farmer. This includes identifying and reaching out to more farmland owners.*
- 2. Alternative land tenure models should be tested, supported, and adopted across the state.*
- 3. There should be a one-stop referral service for farmland seekers.*
- 4. There is a lack of availability of appropriately sized farmland parcels for new and beginning farmers seeking to start small farm businesses.*
- 5. There is a lack of affordable housing opportunities associated with farmland parcels.*
- 6. The agricultural service provider network needs to build better "institutional" relationships with BIPOC service providers.*

*Bristol's Farm, Canton (Connecticut Farmland Trust)*

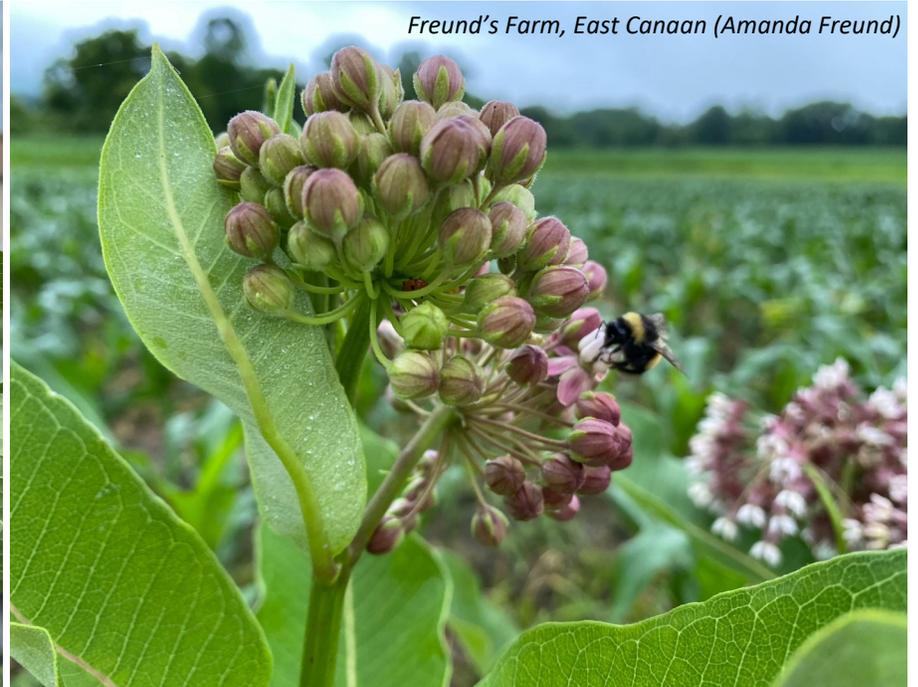


**Key Finding #1: More technical assistance is needed to support landowners in both selling and leasing their land to a farm. This includes identifying and reaching out to more farmland owners.**

Many service providers are working to assist farmland seekers and farmers seeking to transition out of agriculture. Land For Good, UConn Extension, American Farmland Trust, Connecticut Farmland Trust, the Connecticut Land Conservation Council, Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy and Connecticut Food System Alliance have all offered a variety of land access trainings and technical assistance. However, many of these service providers and the farmers they seek to assist see the need for more sustained outreach to landowners, both public and private, in order to generate more farm parcel listings on Connecticut FarmLink. As mentioned earlier, the Connecticut FarmLink website has more farmland seekers than owners. Many farmland owners continue to rely on traditional realtor sites (e.g. MLS sites such as Zillow and Realtor.com) to list their properties, especially if the property includes a residence.

Several ways to expand outreach to landowners were identified. One is to expand “Circuit Rider” program models and outreach to municipalities through entities such as local and regional agricultural commissions and Town Planners through organizations such as the American Planning Association. The Circuit Rider Model would involve service providers offering land access trainings at various agricultural meetings and events throughout the state. These trainings would be open to municipal planners, other service providers, land trust staff and board members, and farmland owners, among many others.

Service providers and municipalities could use the Connecticut Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Viability Grant to fund expanded outreach to residents in their service area. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture recently changed the Agricultural Viability grant to include “increasing access to farmland and farmland preservation”. The change in funding priorities for the Agricultural Viability grant may increase funding for service providers to help farmers with farmland access and transfer. Another option would be to work with the Connecticut Association of Realtors to provide a training program for realtors on working with farm seekers and farm owners. In addition, additional “mixers”, where farm owners and seekers can meet could be helpful. Land for Good and Connecticut Farmland Trust have both expressed an interest in these kinds of outreach efforts.



**Key Finding #2: Alternative land tenure models should be tested, supported, and adopted across the state.**

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are an alternative land tenure model that have been used elsewhere to help farmers, especially in urban areas, gain access to land. Many farmers identified the need for secure land tenure as a barrier to establishing/investing in their farm businesses. Service providers indicated that land access in urban areas was especially challenging because municipalities are not always able to identify town/city owned lands that could be used for farming. Financial support to service providers for this type of model could help to encourage its adoption in Connecticut.

The CLT models have been used successfully across the country to increase land tenure options for farmers. CLT's were originally formed and developed in the south by rural black communities after the Civil Rights Movement and gained traction during the 1980's.<sup>10</sup> Since their inception, CLT's have been a successful model used by affordable housing advocates across the country to address affordability and equity for low-income communities.<sup>11</sup> As the service providers that participated in the research for this report indicated, securing land tenure for urban farms and community gardens is a challenge. CLT's can play a vital role in solving this problem by securing land via one of several tenure arrangements, including fee simple ownership, deed restriction, ground lease, or easement.<sup>121314</sup>

The ground lease model provides another example of an alternative land tenure model. A ground lease allows a farmer to lease the farmland or "ground" and gain equity by purchasing buildings or a house that is located on the leased land. Alternative land tenure models, such as Community Land Trusts and Ground leases, have been successfully implemented by organizations across the country including Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, the Urban Farming Institute, Equity Trust, and Agrarian Trust.



<sup>10</sup> <https://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/report-davis14.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, CLT boards are composed of community leadership, members of the local municipality and neighborhood residents. Community members and CLT stakeholders elect most board members (Hart, 2015). As mentioned above while CLTs have historically operated to ensure affordable housing in communities with strong development pressure, they have taken on increasingly non-residential functions in recent years, including for the establishment of secure land tenure for urban agriculture (Rosenberg & Yuen, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Hart, K. (2015). Reclaiming Philly's Vacant Properties: Strategies for Strengthening the Partnership Between the Philadelphia Land Bank and Local Community Land Trusts. Tufts University. Retrieved on (5/20/20) from [https://pennloh.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/hart-vprn\\_8-6-2015.pdf](https://pennloh.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/hart-vprn_8-6-2015.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Rosenberg, G., & Yuen, J. (2012). Beyond Housing: Urban Agriculture and Commercial Development by Community Land Trusts. Retrieved on (5/20/20) from <http://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.communitywealth.org/files/downloads/paper-rosenburg-yuen.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Joseph, Caitlin (2016). Urban Agriculture in Revere, MA, Tufts University. Prepared for Dr. John Witten's Non-Regulatory Land Use Mechanisms for Improving Land and Food Access course.

***Key Finding #3: There should be a one-stop referral service for farmland seekers.***

Many service providers noted the potential value of a single point of entry for farmland seekers, farmland owners, and farmers transitioning out of agriculture, allowing referrals to the service providers best equipped to deal with the producer's specific needs. Seekers face a variety of challenges—from identifying suitable farmland to lease or purchase, to negotiating lease terms and ensuring that a lease will accommodate their farm business needs. Farmland owners also need assistance in negotiating lease terms and identifying a suitable farmer lessee, and exiting farmers need assistance with identifying successors and developing a transfer or succession plan. A one stop referral service would allow farmers and landowners to more efficiently get the specific information and resources they need and save service providers time and resources by focusing attention on the farmers and landowners they are best equipped to serve.

***Key Finding #4: There is a lack of availability of appropriately sized farmland parcels for new and beginning farmers seeking to start small farm businesses.***

Many new and beginning farmers seek small farmland parcels of less than 30 acres, with 5 to 10 acres of cropland. While Connecticut FarmLink has a fair number of smaller farm parcel listings, there are many more farmland seekers on Connecticut FarmLink than farmland owners. Farm parcels with key infrastructure, such as barns, outbuildings, water sources, and housing are also in high demand, and there is a lack of these types of properties listed on Connecticut FarmLink. This is especially true for farmers looking for land in urban centers and peri-urban areas, especially where there may be service from public transit. Land that may be available from land trusts and municipalities often does not include or allow any infrastructure or housing which limits the agricultural potential.

***Key Finding #5: Connecticut has a lack of affordable housing opportunities associated with farmland parcels.***

A lack of affordable and available farmland is compounded by a shortage of affordable housing. In many communities, there may be landowners (including land trusts and municipalities) willing to let someone lease their land, but there is no housing onsite and no affordable homes for sale or lease in the town. It is not unusual for a beginning farmer to have to commute from several towns away to the farm. This is especially limiting for anyone considering livestock agriculture. On farms protected with an easement, the value of the home and not the land is what often puts the price to purchase the farm out of reach. Existing farms looking to expand are challenged by finding affordable farm worker housing, or by town zoning that restricts it.

***Key Finding #6: The agricultural service provider network needs to build better "institutional" relationships with BIPOC service providers.***

As mentioned earlier in this report, BIPOC farmers face additional challenges while attempting to identify secure land tenure opportunities. A key finding from our service provider focus group is for traditional agricultural service providers to develop more intentional and better relationships with BIPOC led organizations. This will help increase the number of BIPOC farmers and improve secure land tenure options for BIPOC farmers in Connecticut. In order to do this in a thoughtful and meaningful way, service providers must first take time to understand the current socioeconomic status of Black farmers, Indigenous farmers, and other farmers of Color across the state. This includes addressing and fully comprehending the long history of land theft and lack of equitable farmland access opportunities for BIPOC farmers that were created by implementation of inequitable local, state, and federal policies and programs. Services providers and their staff should also consider attending anti-racism trainings. These trainings can provide a foundation for staff and organizational partners to understand how we all uphold and perpetuate systemic racism and can be the first step on the path to creating meaningful relationships with BIPOC farmers and BIPOC led organizations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**We would like to thank and acknowledge the following individuals and organizations for contributing to this report:**

The following service providers participated in a focus group on October 23, 2019, at the Connecticut Forest and Park Association in Middletown, CT:

Clark Chaplin	USDA—Farm Service Agency
Phil Chester	Town of Lebanon
Jeff Cole	The Carrot Project
Paul Elconin	Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy
Elisabeth Moore	Connecticut Farmland Trust
Carol Grasis	USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service
Amy Paterson	Connecticut Land Conservation Council
Cristina Sandolo	Green Village Initiative
Çaca Yvaire	Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust
Bob Wagner	Farmland Access Consultant
Keith Stechschulte	Farm Credit East

The following beginning/expanding farmers participated in a focus group on October 24, 2019, at Connecticut Forest and Park Association in Middletown, CT:

Richard Myers	Green Village Initiative and Park City Harvest
Ellie Youngblood	The Hotchkiss School
Kerry Taylor	Provider Farm
Ellie Angerame	Green Village Initiative
Dina Brewster	The Hickories

The following service providers participated in one-on-one interviews or submitted comments to be considered as part of the Farmland Access Working Group:

Amanda Fargo Johnson	Connecticut Resource Conservation and Development
Graham Stevens	Connecticut Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection
Latha Swamy	City of New Haven Food Policy Division
Natalie Majewski	USDA - Farm Service Agency
Martha Dorsey	USDA - Farm Service Agency
Benneth Phelps	Dirt Capital Partners
Holly Rippon-Butler	National Young Farmers Coalition
Joey Listro	New Britain Roots

The following farmers did one-on-one interviews with the Working Lands Alliance Director - Chelsea Gazillo as part of the Farmland Access Working Group:

Amanda Freund	Freund's Farm
Hassan Aden	All Farmers
Kevin Blacker	Noank, CT
Kies Orr	Fort Hill Farm
Rachel Holden	Buttermilk Lane Farm
Baylee Drown	Upper Pond Farm
Ben Freund	Freund's Farm
Robin Chesmer	Graywall Farms
Jim Smith	Cushman Farms
Isa Mujahid	Al Manna Associates

American Farmland Trust and the CT Department of Agriculture would like to thank the CT Farm Bureau Association and the New CT Farmer Alliance for opening their meetings to us and for the many farmers who attended their annual meetings and contributed to the findings outlined in this report.

## Acronyms

ACEP - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

CFPP - Community Farms Preservation Program

CGS - Connecticut General Statutes

COCS - Cost of Community Services

CSA - Community Sponsored Agriculture

CT DoAg - Connecticut Department of Agriculture

CT DEEP - Connecticut Department of Energy and  
Environmental Protection

EAP - Environmental Assistance Program

FLRP - Farmland Restoration Program

FPP - Farmland Preservation Program

FSA - Farm Service Agency

GIS - Geographical Information System

NASS - National Agricultural Statistic Services

NRCS - Natural Resources Conservation Service

OPAV - Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value

PA 490 - Public Act 490

PACE - Purchase of Agricultural Conservation  
Easements

PDR - Purchase of Development Rights

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

*Reservoir Community Farm—Green Village Initiative (Chelsea Gazillo, Working Lands Alliance, American Farmland Trust)*



# RESOURCES

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The following resources were compiled to clarify current policies and programs already in place to help farmers gain access to farmland and/or pass their farmlands on to the next generation. In addition to the resources assembled herein, there are a number of existing and relevant guides to help farmers, including:

[Farm Credit East Grants and Incentives for Northeast Agriculture Guide](#)

[New CT Bucket List](#)

[Connecticut Agricultural Business Management Guide](#)

[Connecticut Department of Agriculture](#)

[American Farmland Trust's Farmland Information Center \(FIC\)](#)

## **Farmland and Resource Protection**

### **Gaining Access to Land Resources**

- [Farmland ConneCTions](#)
- [Leasing Land to Farmers: A Handbook for New England Land Trusts, Municipalities, and Institutions](#)
- [Finding Farmland: A farmers Guide to working with Land Trusts](#)

### **Soil Testing**

- [USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Web Soil Survey](#)
- [UConn Soil Lab](#)
- [CT Agriculture Experiment Station](#)

### **Finding Farmland**

- [Connecticut Farmlink](#)
- [New England Farmland Finder](#)
- [New England Landlink](#)
- Contact your Town Planner or local Agricultural Commission to enquire about municipal land parcels available for lease
- [National Young Farmers Coalition - Find Farmland Calculator](#)

### **Farmland Leasing Information**

- [UCONN Extension's Farmland Leasing](#)
- [Land for Good](#)

## Loans to Purchase Farmland

- [USDA Farm Service Agency.](#)
- [The Carrot Project](#)
- [Dirt Capital Partners](#)
- [National Young Farmers Coalition - Navigating FSA](#)

## Resources for Black, Indigenous and Farmers of Color

- [Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust](#)
- [CT – CORE – Community Organizing for Racial Equity](#)
- [Soul Fire Farm](#)
- [Heal Food Alliance](#)
- [Love Fed New Haven](#)

## ***Permanently Protecting Farm and Forest Land***

### Direct Assistance for Permanently Protecting Farmland and Forest Land in CT

- [CT Department of Agriculture Farmland Preservation Program](#)
- [NRCS Agricultural Conservation Easement Program - Ag. Land Easements](#)
- [CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection - Open Space Conservation Program](#)
- [Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy](#)
- [Connecticut Farmland Trust](#)

### Technical Assistance for Farmland Preservation and Forest Land Efforts

- [American Farmland Trust](#)
- [Connecticut Land Conservation Council](#)
- [CT Forest and Park Association](#)
- [Connecticut Farm Bureau Association](#)
- [Working Lands Alliance](#)
- [Land for Good](#)

### Resources for Farmland Preservation

- [Conservation Options for Connecticut Farmland](#)
- [Connecticut Planning for Agriculture Guide](#)
- [Public Act 490 Information](#)

## **Protecting Natural Resources on Farms**

### **Cost-share Assistance**

- [NRCS - Agricultural Management Assistance](#)
- [NRCS - Conservation Innovation Grant](#)
- [USDA - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#)
- [USDA - Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [NRCS - Conservation Stewardship Program](#)
- [FSA - USDA - CRP Transitions Incentives Program](#)
- [NRCS - Emergency Watershed Protection Program](#)
- [NRCS - Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture's - Farm Restoration Grant Program](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture's - Farm Transition Grant Program](#)

### **Business Assistance and Development--General**

- [Connecticut Agricultural Business Management Guide](#)

### **Reducing Taxes on Farmland and Farm Infrastructure**

- [UCONN Extension and USDA's Connecticut Agricultural Business Management Guide - Pg. 30-39](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture - Municipal Tax Exemptions for Farm Buildings, Farm Machinery, Horses and Ponies used for farms](#)
- [CT Land Use Tax Code - PA-490: Guide created by CT Farm Bureau Association](#)
- [CT Department of Revenue Services - Farmer's Guide of Sales and Use Taxes, Motor Vehicle Fuels Tax, Estimated Income Tax and Withholding Tax](#)

### **Loans and Grants for Business Development**

- [CT Department of Agriculture's Farm Viability Grant](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture's Farm Reinvestment Grant](#)
- [American Farm Bureau Association Farm Bureau Rural Entrepreneurship Challenge](#)
- [USDA's Rural Business Development Grant](#)
- [USDA's Rural Economic Development Grant](#)
- [USDA's Value Added Producer Grant](#)
- [The New England Grassroots Environmental Fund](#)

## Direct Assistance for Farm Succession and Transitions

- [CT Department of Agriculture's Farm Transition Grant Program](#)
- [Land for Good](#)
- [American Farmland Trust](#)
- [CT Farm Bureau Association](#)
- [CT Agricultural Mediation Program](#)

## Loans and Grants for Farm Energy Development

- [CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Net Metering](#)
- [CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection - Renewable Energy Property Tax Exemption](#)
- [USDA's AFRI Sustainable Bioenergy and Bioproducts](#)

## Assistance for Organic Farming and Certification

- [USDA's National Organic Initiative](#)
- [OCIA's Organic Certification Cost Share Program](#)
- [OCIA's Organic Micro Grant](#)
- [Simply Organic's 1% Fund Grant](#)
- [UNFI Foundation Grants](#)
- [Connecticut – Northeast Organic Farming Association](#)

*Provider Farm, Salem (CT Dept. of Agriculture)*



## **Business Assistance and Development-Commodity Specific**

### **Aquaculture**

- [FSA - Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm Raised Fish](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture - Shellfish Leasing Opportunities](#)
- [NRCS - Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative System for Crops](#)

### **Nursery and Flower**

- [FSA Tree Assistance Program](#)
- [FSA - Noninsurance Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#)

### **Fruits and Vegetable**

- [CT Department of Agriculture - CT Grown Program](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture Weekly Agriculture Reports](#)
- [NRCS High Tunnel Systems Initiative](#)
- [USDA Fruit and Vegetable Specialty Crop news](#)
- [USDA Values Added Producer Grants](#)
- [USDA Rural Business Development Grants](#)
- [USDA Local Food Promotion Program](#)
- [USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program](#)
- [USDA Community Food Projects](#)
- [USDA - Local Food Compass Map](#)
- [USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program](#)
- [SBA - Small Business Administration Microloan Program](#)

### **Dairy**

#### **Dairy Support**

- [CT Department of Agriculture Dairy Sustainability Grant Program](#)
- [FSA - Dairy Margin Protection Program](#)

### **Poultry**

#### **Storage Support**

- [FSA Farm Storage Facility Loan Program](#)

## **Honey bees**

- [FSA - Farm Storage Facility Loan Program](#)
- [FSA - Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm Raised Fish Program](#)

## **Forestry**

- [FSA - Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#)
- [FSA - Conservation Reserve Program](#)
- [FSA - Forest Stewardship Program](#)
- [FSA - Forest Landowner Resource Program](#)

## **Agro-Forestry**

- [FS - Agroforestry Program](#)

## **Forest Farming**

- [CT Forest and Park Association](#)
- [Permaculture Association of the Northeast](#)

## **Urban and Community Forestry**

- [FS - Urban and Community Forestry](#)

## **Livestock**

- [FSA - USDA - Livestock Forage Program](#)
- [FSA -USDA - Livestock Indemnity Program](#)
- [USDA - Livestock Gross Margin Program](#)

## **Market Assistance and Development**

### **Market Assistance**

#### **Farmers' Markets in CT**

- [CT Department of Agriculture List of Local Farmers Markets](#)
- [CTGrownMap.com](#)

#### **Farm to Institute Opportunities**

- [CT Department of Agriculture Farm to School Program](#)
- [CT Farm to Institute](#)
- [UConn - Put Local on Your Tray](#)

## **Direct to Consumer Grant Opportunities**

- [CT Department of Agriculture - CT Grown Program](#)

## **Food Hubs in CT**

- [Brass City Harvest](#)
- [Northwest Connecticut Regional Food Hub](#)

## **Urban and Community Garden Assistance**

**Access finding urban land - the following organizations can be contacted to help identify where to farm in CT's metropolises**

- [Bridgeport Food Policy Council](#)
- [New Haven Land Trust](#)
- [New Haven Food Policy Council](#)
- [Hartford Food System](#)
- [Hartford Food Policy Council](#)
- [New Britain Roots](#)
- [CT Land Conservation Council](#)
- [KNOX Hartford](#)
- [Love Fed New Haven](#)
- [CT – CORE](#)
- [Brass City Harvest](#)
- [FRESH New London](#)
- [Fairgate Farm](#)

## **Planning for Urban Agriculture**

- [Bridgeport - Urban Agriculture Master Plan](#)
- [American Farmland Trust - Planning for Agriculture: A Guide for CT Municipalities](#)
- [Connecticut Farmland Trust - American Farmland Trust - Conservation Options for Municipalities and Land Trusts](#)
- [EPA - Local Food, Local Places Grant Program](#)

## **Urban and Community Garden Grant Programs**

- [Department of Energy and Environmental Protection - Open Space and Watershed Acquisition Grant Program](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture Community Farms Protection Program](#)

## Grant Opportunities for Agricultural Professionals and Service Providers

- [USDA - Socially-Disadvantaged Groups Grant](#)
- [USDA - Local Food Promotion Program](#)
- [USDA - Farmers Market Promotional Program](#)
- [USDA - Beginning Farmer and Ranch Development Program](#)
- [USDA - Risk Management Education](#)
- [USDA - Outreach Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers -2501 Program](#)
- [CT Department of Agriculture - Ag. Viability Grant Program](#)
- [Northeast SARE](#)
- [New England Grassroots Environmental Fund](#)
- [Patagonia Grant Program](#)
- [Harvard Pilgrim Foundation](#)
- [Newman's Own Grant Program](#)
- [CT Community Foundation](#)
- [New Haven Community Foundation](#)
- [Greater Hartford Community Foundation](#)
- [Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation](#)
- [Community Foundation of Middlesex County](#)
- [Community Foundation of Southeast Connecticut](#)
- [Fairfield County Community Foundation](#)

*Service Providers, Kip Kolesinskas with CT Farmland Trust FarmLink, Chelsea Gazillo with American Farmland Trust, and Baylee Drown from Long Table Farm, Lyme, CT, discuss soil health (Working Lands Alliance)*



**UConn Extension**

The Impact of Connecticut’s Farmland Preservation Program on Farmland Access

Jiff Martin, UConn Extension; Will O’Meara, Land For Good; and Lily Orr, Connecticut Farmland Trust

Oct. 2019

**Introduction**

Connecticut’s Farmland Preservation Program, also known as PDR-Purchase of Development Rights Program, has successfully protected 362<sup>15</sup> farms since its inception in 1979. Our research goal was to better understand *how* and *if* the PDR Program is having an impact on farmland access for Connecticut’s farmers. Using records from the PDR Program administered by the CT Department of Agriculture (CT DoAg), we compiled and reviewed several pieces of data to assemble general facts, figures, and key findings.

Unfortunately, our findings were limited by the data available. We were not able to draw any conclusions about lease prices on a PDR farm, % of protected acreage that is actively farmed, or the impact of impervious surface limitations.

**Facts and Figures**

<i>Total Acreage of Protected Farms</i>	<i>43,638.63</i>
Average Acreage of Protected Farms	120.88
Largest Protected Farm	636.94
Smallest Protected Farm	7.58
# of Protected Farms in Community Farms Preservation Program	9
# of Protected Farms with a Partnership with Federal Government (NRCS)	114
Avg price/acre for PDR <sup>16</sup>	\$4,592.33
Highest price/acre for PDR	\$21,248.21
Lowest price/acre for PDR	\$284.90
# of PDR farms with subsequent sale <sup>17</sup>	53
Avg price/acre on subsequent sale	\$6,192.74
Avg acreage on subsequent sale	117.96
# of PDR farms being leased	37

<sup>15</sup> Our total is based on records shared by CT Dept. of Agriculture. Variation on this total is possible given different methods of counting easements in the database.

<sup>16</sup> This figure is adjusted to not include donations.

<sup>17</sup> There is no formal system that guarantees the state will learn of a subsequent sale or lease of a PDR farm, so at this time the database indicates 53 subsequent sales and 37 leases. Monitoring of PDR farms, to the extent that CT Dept. of Agriculture has staff capacity to do these, can help discover these resales and leases.

## Key Findings

1. **Due to capacity constraints, the current land use on all PDR farms is unclear.** The following uses were documented at the time of the purchase of development rights. Determining how protected farm parcels are currently being used would help the state identify underutilized parcels and target landowners for information on using the CT FarmLink program that might create opportunities for new or expanding farmers in Connecticut.

*Land Use on All Protected Farms (at the time of purchase of development rights)*

Hay	210	Fruit	23
Corn	130	Wood/timber	8
Dairy	35	Nursery	8
Pasture	40	Tobacco	19
Livestock	52	None/unused	4
Vegetable	44	Unknown	85

2. **The 53 farms for which the state has data on a subsequent sale represent a variety of land uses. The most common land use is hay, occurring on 68% of PDR farms with subsequent sales.** Additional and consistent data could further our understanding of the current use of resold PDR farms, including whether subsequent owners made changes to the farming enterprises on each farm. With this data, we could better understand what types of farm businesses are purchasing Connecticut's protected farms when they come up for sale.

*Land Use on Resold PDR Farms*

Hay	36	Fruit	3
Corn	19	Wood/timber	0
Dairy	3	Nursery	1
Pasture	6	Tobacco	2
Livestock	5	None/unused	1
Vegetable	5	Unknown	7

3. **37 (10.2%) of the farms protected through the PDR Program are under a lease.** In order to draw conclusions regarding leases, more data is required. Current land use on leased farms is presented in the chart below. We were unable to determine how many acres in total were being leased, the quantity and demographics of farmers being leased to, and the price of the leases on the land. These data points are crucial to determine the impact of the PDR Program on the affordability and availability of farmland for lease.

Land Use on Leased Protected Farms

Hay	29	Fruit	2
Corn	22	Wood/timber	1
Dairy	1	Nursery	2
Pasture	4	Tobacco	3
Livestock	6	None/unused	2
Vegetable	7	Unknown	1

4. **Data on subsequent sales suggests that the PDR Program has helped to drive down the price/acre of a PDR farm in a subsequent sale compared to an unprotected farm.** According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service’s (NASS) 2019 summary of land values, Connecticut’s average farm real estate value (crop land and buildings) is \$12,200.<sup>18</sup> Of the 362 farms enrolled in the PDR program, 53 were sold at least once for an average price of \$6,192.74 per acre.

More data is needed in this area to draw more conclusive results regarding farmland access. The Department of Agriculture’s data only included the most recent sale of a protected farm; any prior sales were not represented in our data set. Plus, there could be sales that the department does not know about or did not update in the database.

5. **The distribution of protected farms by acreage shows a concentration of acreage in mid-to-large size farms. Almost 75% of protected farms fall between fifty and 199 acres.** More research is needed to determine the desired acreage of farms for future farmers and how to appropriately construct easements to respond to projected demand for acreage as the current generation of farmers transition out of farming.

Distribution of Farms by Acreage

Acreage Range	1-49	50-99	100-149	150-199	200-49	250-299
# of Farms	54	128	86	54	18	5
Total Acres in Range	1,855	9,430	10,619	9,430	4,058	1,397
Percentage of Farms	15%	35%	24%	15%	5%	1%
Percentage of Acreage	4%	22%	24%	22%	9%	3%

Acreage Range	300-349	350-399	400-449	450-499	500+
# of Farms	6	2	3	1	4
Total Acres in Range	1,955	760	1,282	468	2,384
Percentage of Farms	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Percentage of Acreage	4%	2%	3%	1%	5%

<sup>18</sup> Land Values 2019 Summary, USDA- National Agricultural Statistics Service, August 2019.

6. **There is a downward trend in average acreage of conservation easements over time which may help with farmland access for those seeking smaller parcels in the future.** Due to capital constraints and the type of agriculture being pursued by new and beginning farmers, large acreages are often a poor fit for both affordability and practicality. The continuation of this trend, as well as added configuration flexibility in both future and existing easements might help for the PDR Program to respond to the needs of both new and retiring farmers in Connecticut.

Farms Protected by Decade

Decade	1979-1989 <sup>19</sup>	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2019
Average Acreage Protected	141.57	135.25	110.93	95.4
# of Farms Protected	113 farms	77 farms	64 farms	108 farms

7. Connecticut’s portfolio of PDR farms by county are nearly proportional to the farms by county at large. That said, farm seekers by county are much more evenly distributed. For example, with only three protected farms in Fairfield County, the 136 farm seekers in this county may be better served to look elsewhere in the state for protected farmland. **Given the high number of farm seekers across the state, the data suggests that the presence of PDR farms will facilitate land access more effectively in counties like Litchfield and New London where protected farms are more plentiful.**

Protected Farms by County

Fairfield	3	Hartford	56
Litchfield	74	New Haven	13
Middlesex	12	New London	90
Tolland	44	Windham	73

Farms by County<sup>20</sup>

Fairfield	402	Hartford	786
Litchfield	1217	New Haven	686
Middlesex	441	New London	823
Tolland	520	Windham	646

Farm Seekers by County<sup>21</sup>

Fairfield	136	Hartford	188
Litchfield	167	New Haven	169
Middlesex	162	New London	158
Tolland	130	Windham	137

<sup>19</sup> Period of time is one year longer to accommodate first year of the Farmland Preservation Program

<sup>20</sup> Connecticut County Summary Highlights 2017, USDA- National Agricultural Statistics Service.

<sup>21</sup> Active CT Farmlink users as of Oct 2019.

8. **The CT Department of Agriculture has a unique partnership with Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) which appears to help address a critical need in monitoring and farmland linking.** Fourteen of the 362 (3.9%) protected farms are monitored by CFT, a land trust with a vested interest in keeping protected farms working. Through their partnership with CT DoAg, CFT co-holds the development rights for these farms and conducts yearly stewardship visits to ensure responsible agricultural use of protected farms. In the event of a farmer retiring or land falling out of use, CFT provides resources to find and recruit a new farmer through their administration of CT FarmLink. CT DoAg has a similar relationship with Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy.

## Conclusion

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Although the underlying data on PDR farms needs improvement, we feel these key findings help further our understanding of the state’s Farmland Preservation Program and its impact on farmland access. Updated and complete farmland sales and lease data would show a clearer picture regarding who owns and manages Connecticut’s farmland, and how it is being utilized. In addition, improved monitoring and interaction with current landowners might help surface opportunities when landowners are transitioning away from farming and may be willing to sell or lease to a farmland seeker. For example, if a monitoring visit from the Department of Agriculture or Connecticut Farmland Trust reveals that a farm is overgrown, falling into disrepair, or the current farmer is retiring, the state could refer the owner to the CT FarmLink program as well as partners at Land For Good or UConn Extension for additional tools and resources. Increased capacity would help the state and its partners to take a more proactive role in ensuring the transfer of Connecticut’s farmland to the next generation of farmers.

## The State of Farmland in Connecticut

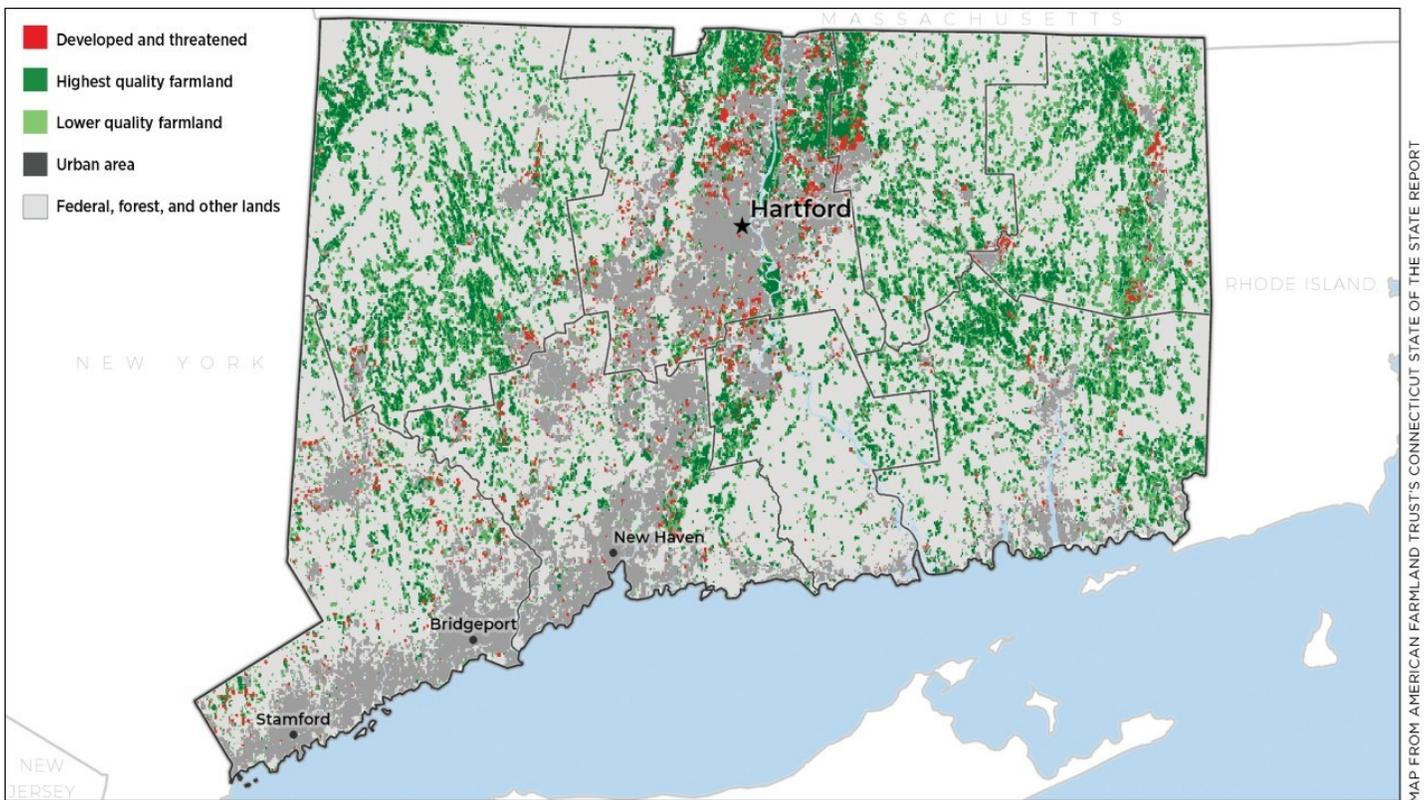
In 2020 American Farmland Trust released the “*Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*” and “*Farms Under Threat: A New England Perspective*” reports.<sup>[1]</sup> The reports outline the current state of America’s agricultural landscape –and took an even deeper dive into New England’s farmland. Between 2001 and 2016, 11 million acres of farmland and rangeland were converted to urban and highly developed land use (4.1 million acres) or low-density residential land use (nearly 7 million acres). This total is equal to all the U.S. farmland devoted to fruit, nut, and vegetable production in 2017, or 2,000 acres a day.

In Connecticut, 22,994 acres of farmland were converted to urban or low-density residential development between 2001 and 2016. In this period, over 6% of Connecticut’s farmland was converted, placing the state in the top three, nationally, for percent of farmland lost to development. For more information about farmland loss, tools for prioritizing protection, and policies that combat that loss, see: <https://farmland.org/project/farms-under-threat/>, <https://farmland.org/project/farms-under-threat-new-england/>.

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[1] Freedgood, J., M. Hunter, J. Dempsey, A. Sorensen. 2020. *Farms Under Threat: The State of the States*. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust.

Low-density residential development was responsible for much of the conversion in this period, which impacts farming by restricting the amount of contiguous farmland available, thereby reducing farms' ability to scale up and remain viable. Trends show that Connecticut farmland under low-density residential development in 2001 was 4.5 times more likely to be completely urbanized by 2016. Swaths of high-quality farmland remain in Connecticut. Roughly half of all farmland in Connecticut is considered nationally significant, the tier of highest-quality farmland across the country and is concentrated in the Connecticut River Valley and pockets of Litchfield, New London, and Windham counties. This assault on our working lands occurred despite the Great Recession, plummeting housing starts, and declining population growth. While Connecticut has taken steps to protect their agricultural land base, they all could—and must—do more.





Maple Lane Farm, Preston (John Spinnato, Eighty-Six Media)